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February 24, 2010

To the Chair and Honorable Members of the General Law Committee:

I am Ronnie P. Lizana, a solar installer with 5 years experience in the field. This is a testimony of my opposition to the raised **Bill No. 5225, "An Act Concerning Solar Work."**

What the bill calls "solar electricity work" is a very specialized type of work that should not be performed by an electrician who simply took an approved solar installation training course. I believe a specialized trade requires a specialized license and the work is best and most safely executed by those who have dedicated interest, experience, and knowledge in this specialized field.

This is not to exclude electricians, since many of them fall in this category, but so do many highly trained and skilled solar installers who are not electricians and who do not wish to expand their activities to include all that electricians do. I have dedicated much of the past ten years of my life to learning the ins and outs of solar and other renewable energies, five of which have been in the field. This kind of knowledge and determination cannot be acquired through a simple installer's course.

Most solar installers I know have followed similar paths, and are consequently far more knowledgeable about and skilled in working with solar equipment than are electricians who lack that experience. The safest and most reliable solar installation is one completed by an experienced solar installer.

As well, to require a solar installer to obtain an E-1 license makes no sense: a large portion of E1 training and work requirements will never apply in the dedicated PV installer's line of work. Specialized PV installers do not wish to wire an entire house. A PV installer's job is to design and assemble sun-powered generators. This is a specific installation procedure with specialize components. One does not require an electrician to design and assemble a diesel-powered generator, so why should it be required for PV? The E-1 does not build the generator; he connects the generator to the home via the meter. In similar fashion, the E-1 makes the connection from the PV "generator" to the home via the meter.

Asking an E-1 to take on PV responsibilities would require them to obtain a new set of tools, skills, and knowledge that are not a part of the standard E-1 repertoire. As experts in our field, PV installers understand scaffolding, roof structures, and penetrations, racking systems, construction of ground and pole-mount structures, and proper array sizing based on environmental factors and equipment efficiencies. Requiring E-1 licensing to work with PV systems would be akin to requiring a mechanic to obtain an E-1 license in order to fix the electrical system of a car. Similarly, it would be like requiring an E-1 to take a course on motor vehicle electrical systems and then ruling that they are the only ones licensed to perform this work.

I am not saying that E-1s should be excluded from performing solar work, only that people who do not wish to pursue careers as electricians should be able to pursue careers in solar electric work. As a separate field, the PV arena does not take work away from current electrical contractors. In all my installation experience, I have found it extremely beneficial to share the work with electricians as we both had very specific and complimentary knowledge sets. By law we are required to work with a licensed electrician to connect the systems to the grid.

This enables PV installers to focus on expanding their knowledge of the systems themselves and addressing installation problems, without having to acquire knowledge of a home's entire electrical system. Current law enables established E-1s to install PV systems. The changes in this proposal will be detrimental to the renewable energy work force in the State of Connecticut. By severely limiting the number of licensed installers, purchasers of PV will have to hire companies from further away, which would result in higher prices, and a decrease in local employment.

In closing, there is great economic value in maintaining separate licensing for PV. This creates a whole new area for jobs which will drive local economies. If this bill is passed, a large percent of PV installers in the state of CT will be out of business. This business could then potentially be in the hands of electrical installers with little to no experience.

I urge you to oppose this bill and re-evaluate the current licensing laws. I would also suggest creating a new, separate renewable energy licensing board made up of experienced individuals to oversee the quality of the renewable energy work force. Many groups already exist that would be well-qualified to do this. Despite the current economic hardships, I believe that the renewable energy field will continue to grow and its regulations may require more focused attention; however, this bill is step backwards, the wrong direction for Connecticut.

Sincerely,
Ronnie P. Lizana